

Locust Grove Kitchen
800 Locust Avenue
Charlottesville
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1022

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOCUST GROVE KITCHEN

HABS No. VA-1022

Location: 810 Locust Avenue, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Downing L. Smith.

Present Condition: Fair.

Significance: Locust Grove Kitchen is part of the service buildings complex located behind a pre-1844 late Georgian Style residence. The house was built between 1841 and 1844 by George Sinclair, the owner of Sinclairs' Gristmill, and partner in Lobban & Sinclair, dealers in hardware. The estate maintained a barn, smokehouse, icehouse, and a kitchen. During General Sheridan's raid on Charlottesville in March of 1865, a regiment was encamped at Locust Grove.

HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION

In 1735, Nicholas Meriwether received a crown grant for 1,020 acres of land located on the Rivanna River, extending from Moore's Creek to Meadow Creek. Nicholas and his wife Elizabeth Crawford raised eight children, and divided portions of his vast landholdings, including the 1,020 acres, among them. He also left a tract of land containing 696 acres to his grandson Nicholas Lewis, son of Robert and Jane Lewis.

Nicholas Lewis was uncle to Meriwether Lewis, the famous explorer. His land adjoined Charlottesville on the east and was known as "The Farm". Nicholas lived at what is now known as 309 12th Street. The original house was built by his grandfather around 1735. The house burned prior to the Revolution, and was replaced by Col. Nicholas Lewis. In 1781, Col. Tarleton spent a night in Lewis' home. Nicholas Lewis was described as "... a public spirited man, a Captain in the Revolution, a magistrate, Surveyor and Sheriff of the county, possessed of a sound judgment and kindly spirit, appealed to on all occasions to compose the strifes of the neighborhood, the trusted friend of Mr. Jefferson, and the adviser of his family during his long absences from home. Nicholas married Mary Walker, the eldest daughter of Dr. Thomas Walker. Their eight children were, Nicholas M., Thomas W., Robert Warner, Jane, Elizabeth, Mildred, Mary and Margaret.

On September 4, 1835, Thomas W. Lewis inherited Locust Grove, the northern part of this father's farm. Thomas was known for his kindness to his servants and his belief in the equality of all men. Thomas married Elizabeth Meriwether, daughter of Nicholas Meriwether, and their children were Nicholas H., Margaret, Mary, Lydia, Thomas, Charles, Elizabeth, Alice, Jane and Robert W. After Thomas died, Elizabeth transferred 888 acres to her son, Nicholas H. Lewis, on August 1, 1818. Nicholas H. and

his wife Ann T. obtained numerous parcels of land from his co-heirs in addition to the 888 acres. On September 4, 1835, Elizabeth Lewis, Nicholas H. and his wife Ann T., conveyed 534 acres of "The Farm" to Thomas W. Meriwether. Four years later, on September 19, 1839, Thomas W. Meriwether and Anne C., his wife, sold the 534 acre plantation to George Sinclair of "Rock Hill," Loudoun County.

Sinclair constructed the Locust Grove residence as well as the outbuildings between 1841 and 1844. According to the Albemarle County Tax Records, Sinclair's taxes increased by \$3.59 in 1843. This may indicate a construction date for the house.

The 1850 census recognized George Sinclair as a farmer of considerable wealth. According to the census figures, his real estate was valued at \$34,000. In addition to farming, Sinclair owned a gristmill on Meadow Creek, northeast of his residence. Transactions from the mill are recorded in the Executor Accounts located in Albemarle County Will Book 22-255. Sinclair was also a partner in the hardware establishment of Lobban & Sinclair.

During General Sheridan's raid on Charlottesville in March of 1865, a regiment was encamped at Locust Grove. Soldiers carried off horses, servants, and other valuables owned by the Sinclairs. At the time, Mrs. Sinclair was nursing a Confederate soldier and was successful in concealing his presence from the enemy. A list of Sinclair's possessions is recorded in the inventory of his estate. His landholdings as well as his household goods clearly indicate a man of great wealth.

Locust Grove remained in the Sinclair family until December 26, 1892 when Sinclair's executors conveyed the majority of the property to Locust Grove Investment Corporation. On February 22, 1893, the dwelling and two acres were conveyed to Judge John M. White. Later that same year, White bought an additional lot adjacent to the house. On March 30, 1915, White's executors sold the property to Colonel J. A. Cole. The property was sold on November 14, 1923 to John W. Fishburne and L. F. Smith. Fishburne conveyed his one-half interest to Smith on May 5, 1924. On May 5, 1948, Lemuel F. Smith sold the land and buildings to Grace S. Smith, mother of the present owner. The property was transferred to their son, Downing L. Smith, on October 30, 1958. Locust Grove estate is presently owned by Downing L. Smith, a Charlottesville lawyer.

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MAPS

Green Peyton Map 1875.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

General Statement and Description.

Locust Grove Kitchen is a fine example of vernacular Late Georgian architecture in Charlottesville, Virginia. The one-and-one-half story structure is composed of load bearing brick walls supporting a mortised and tenoned gable roof system. The single-pile, one-over-one room plan served as a kitchen on the first floor and as slave quarters on the floor above. The doors and windows are not symmetrically located on the facade. A brick interior end chimney served the large cook's fireplace on the ground floor and the slave's fireplace directly above. Unfortunately, around 1920 the kitchen was converted into a two-car garage; portions of the front wall and the cook's fireplace were removed to increase the floor area. This conversion has caused extensive structural damage throughout the kitchen which necessitates the need for stabilization to prevent further deterioration.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

Overall Dimensions: The kitchen measures 21' - 3 1/2" in width by 18' - 0 3/4" in depth. From ground level to the ridge of the roof on the front facade is approximately 20' - 3".

Foundations: The load bearing walls rest directly upon clay. The foundations show no sign of settling.

Exterior Wall Construction: The 13" walls are laid in five course American Bond combined with Flemish Bond. Indications of white penciled joints are still evident.

Structural System: The kitchen is constructed of load bearing walls with joists inserted into pockets. A lintel composed of four 2" by 10" boards was inserted around 1920 when the NW opening was enlarged. The composite lintel is failing under the loading. The second floor is constructed of joists averaging 2 1/2 by 9 1/2" placed 20" on center and running NW to SE. The joists are supported on the NW by the composite lintel and on the SE by the brick wall. Removal of the cook's fireplace at the time of conversion, made it necessary to add support to the upstairs fireplace, hearth, and floor. Two 2" by 10" members were nailed beneath the joist system to support the upstairs loads. The roof rafters measure 3" by 4" and are mortised and tenoned at the ridge joint, all ceiling ties except the two located above the stairs are nailed to the roof rafters, the stair rafters are notched and nailed into place.

Chimney: A brick interior chimney on the SE end served the large cook's fireplace (removed) and the slave's fireplace on the second floor. The entire chimney above the roof ridge has been rebuilt.

Doorways, Doors: The main entrance to the kitchen is located on the first floor on the NW side directly in front of the stairs. Apparently, the front door with vertical boards and horizontal battens is not original, although the wrought iron hook and strap hinges appear to be original. The SE or garden entrance is positioned off-center and consists of two recessed bevel-edged panels with four lights of glass above the middle rail. The door frame is cased with a quarter-round molding on the exterior. The enlargement of the NW facade required the removal of a large section of the brick wall. Only one sliding garage door remains intact.

Windows: The two casement windows contain four lights of glass each and are located on the second floor.

Roof: The roof is a moderately-pitched gable roof covered with asphalt shingles. A "mousetooth" cornice runs the length of both the NW and SE sides. Only one mouse-tooth is missing on the SE side.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

Floor Plans: The kitchen is a single-pile one-over-one room plan.

Stairway: The stairway is located along the NE wall and is rather steep, containing only 11 risers. The handrail is constructed of galvanized pipe.

Flooring: The first floor is laid in brick and stone. The second floor is 1" tongue-and-groove pine varying from 6" to 9 1/2" in width.

Wall and Ceiling Finish: Walls on the first floor are whitewashed. The second floor walls are covered with a thin coating of plaster. The slanted ceiling is constructed of horizontal boards coated with plaster while the flat ceiling is plaster and paper on wooden lathe.

Doorways, Doors: A single door with six flush bevelled panels is located at the top of the stairway at the landing. In addition to the wooden slide latch is a wrought iron thumb latch and pull handle.

Interior Trim: A simple baseboard molding runs on all four walls of the second floor. The second floor fireplace is surrounded by simple architrave molding and retains a plain wooden shelf.

Mechanical and Electrical Equipment: Presently, there is only one electrical outlet and one light fixture on each floor.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Orientation and General Setting: Locust Grove Kitchen is located near the intersection of Locust Avenue and Hazel Street. The long axis of the building runs from North Northeast to South Southeast.

Historic Landscape Design: The estate is situated on flat topography and is encompassed by a row of American Boxwoods. A formal garden is located behind the kitchen and is now used as a flower and vegetable garden. The lawn contains numerous oaks and pine trees.

Outbuildings: A smokehouse is adjacent to the kitchen on the SE side. Construction of the smokehouse is similar to that of the kitchen. Remains of a stone chimney and brick foundation walls are located 25' SE of the smokehouse along the gravel driveway. Approximately 60' SE of the smokehouse stood a circular icehouse. A 12' depression in the driveway marks the position of the icehouse.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken at the School of Architecture of the University of Virginia under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Professor of Architecture. The documentation was produced in the Spring Semester, 1981 by Robert L. Hillier, Graduate Student in Architectural History/Preservation. The documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.